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ABSTRACT

For many years the techniques for preparing native foods were retained only through memory. In an effort to preserve the traditional art of cooking, 21 recipes for Navajo foods and 22 descriptions of edible wild plants and their preparation are presented in this cookbook. Each recipe gives the name of the dish in Navajo and English, lists the required ingredients, and provides steps for preparing the dish. The recipes are for breads, cakes, mushes, tamales, meats, tortillas, and beans. The second section describes plants, vegetables, fruits, and nuts. Each entry gives the name of the plant in English, Latin, and Navajo; provides an illustration; describes the plant and its growing conditions; and mentions how to use it. A brief history on the preparation of native foods and a poem are also included. (JMM/ERB)

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COOKBOOK

Ch'iyáán 'íl'íní binaaltsoos

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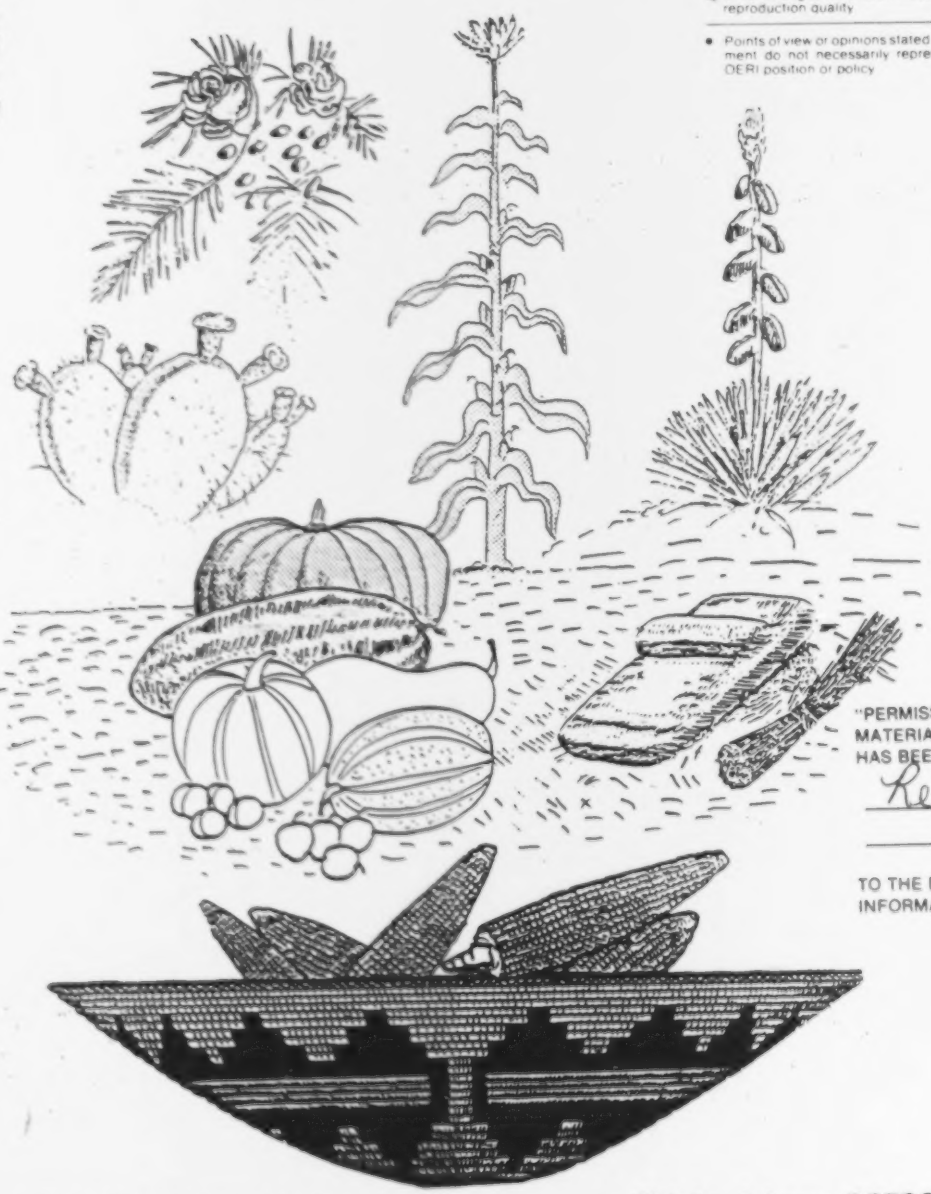

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ROUGH ROCK DEMONSTRATION SCHOOL

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COOKBOOK

Ch'iyáán 'íl'íní binaaltsoos

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1986

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FOREWORD

Since its founding in February 1967, the Navajo Curriculum Center has pioneered the development of high quality, innovative teaching resources on Navajo history, culture, and language. The present volume on native foods follows that tradition, and fills a void in a topic area in which few materials exist.

Regina Hadley Lynch, the author, is eminently qualified to address this topic. Her upbringing at Kitsillie, Arizona, on Black Mesa, instilled traditional values relating to the use of the land and its resources. This upbringing also involved learning the qualities associated with Navajo womanhood: an appreciation of hard work, and of generous, respectful relations with others. Mrs. Lynch carried those values into her work later in life—her education at St. Michael's Mission, at Northern Arizona University and at the University of New Mexico, and her experience as a social worker in a large metropolitan area.

Today, a mother with children of her own, Mrs. Lynch continues to impart those values, both in the context of family and community life at Rough Rock and Kitsillie-Black Mesa, and as a writer and editor of Navajo books. She has authored, co-authored and edited numerous bilingual-bicultural curriculum products, including one of the few Navajo dictionaries designed for classroom use, ***Saad Ahaah Sinil—Dual Language,*** *and a host of Navajo social studies and language arts textbooks and teaching guides. As the Navajo Curriculum Center's Materials Development Specialist, Mrs. Lynch represents Rough Rock's bilingual-bicultural philosophy to a wider audience, disseminating materials and training others in their use.*

Teresa McCarty
Phoenix Arizona

May 1986

INTRODUCTION

The Navajo Curriculum Center is proud to announce its publication on preparations of Native foods. Many tribal schools and programs throughout the Southwest have been concentrating on preserving the traditional and cultural aspects of each of their tribes. Therefore, this publication was felt to be a critical part of educating young Navajo people.

For many years the Navajo people relied primarily on a diet that consisted of mutton, fried bread and coffee. It wasn't very often that any type of vegetable and/or dessert was included in the meal. For generations, the techniques for preparing Native foods were preserved orally, as well as being continued by those individuals who were interested enough in teaching their children the art of the traditional cooking.

The basic food groups consist of the following: mutton and beef in the meat group; goat and cow's milk in the dairy group; wild plants in the vegetable group; cornmeal, cornmeal mush, roasted or steamed corn in the bread and cereal group.

Recipes for foods prepared under each of these groups were previously retained only through memory. The measuring of ingredients was done with the hands and/or fingers. In the early days, most of the cooking was done over an open fire—mainly for roasting and boiling—and by underground baking. Today, gas stoves and microwave ovens have taken the place of the old way of preparing food. Most food products bought today are ready-made and give little chance for the younger generation to realize the significance of preparing foods in the traditional manner. However, it is hoped the younger generation will make a strong effort to preserve and continue the traditional way of preparing food, and this cookbook may be the means of such an important preservation.

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All I Wanted

All I wanted was the bread to turn out like hers just once
brown crust
soft, airy insides
rich and round
that was all.
So I asked her: How many cups?
Ah yaa ah, she said,
tossing flour and salt into a large silver bowl.
I don't measure with cups.
I just know by my hands,
just a little like this is right, see?
You young people always ask
those kind of questions,
she said,
thrusting her arms into the dough
and turning it over and over again.
The table trembles with her movements.
I watch silently and this coffee is good,
strong and fresh.
Outside, her son is chopping wood,
his body an intense arc.
The dull rhythm of winter
is the swinging of the axe
and the noise of children squeezing in
with the small sighs of the wind
through the edges of the windows.
She pats and tosses it furiously
shaping balls of warm, soft dough.
There, we'll let it rise,
she says, sitting down now.
We drink coffee and there is nothing
like the warm smell of bread rising
on windy, woodchopping afternoons.

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NATIVE NAVAJO FOODS and THEIR PREPARATION

KNEELDOWN BREAD (Nitsidigo'í)

Ingredients:

12 ears of fresh corn
corn husks

Preparation:

1. Scrape the kernels from 12 ears of fresh corn.
2. Grind the kernels on a metate* into a mush
3. Make small packages of the mush by wrapping them in corn husks.
4. Dig a pit in the ground about one yard across and 10 inches deep. Then build a fire in the pit.
5. When the pit is thoroughly heated, take the hot coals out and place the packages in the ground and cover with some fresh leaves and slightly moist dirt, then cover with coals.
6. Build a fire over it and bake at least one hour. After cooking remove from the pit and serve hot with mutton stew, or dry and preserve for the winter.

Metate is a stone with a concave upper surface used as the nether millstone for grinding grains and especially maize (Indian corn).

BLUE BREAD (Báá́h doot'izhi)

Ingredients:

1 cup juniper ash with 1 cup boiling water
3½ cups water
6 cups blue cornmeal
2 cups salt water

Preparation:

1. Mix 1 cup juniper ash and 1 cup boiling water.
2. Put 3½ cups water in a pot and boil.
3. Strain ashes into water and stir.
4. Add 6 cups blue cornmeal. Knead until a soft dough is formed.
5. Shape into small round patties.
6. Put on hot skillet. Heat until brown on both sides.
7. Dip with salt water.
8. Serve with coffee and mutton stew.

*NOTE
There are many different varieties of corn with red, blue, pink and black kernels. Some kernels have bands, spots, or stripes. Corn plays an important part in the religion life of many Indian tribes, and is especially significant for Navajos.

The most popular corn among the Navajos, Hopis, and the Indians of the pueblos is blue corn. The color may seem a little strange to the uninitiated, but flavor is superior to that of white or yellow corn. Although blue cornmeal may be subsituted for white or yellow cornmeal in any recipe the dishes are traditionally made with blue corn.

Blue cornmeal has always been considered more nutritious than other colors. Among Navajos it was thought an especially appropriate food to include in the diet of pregnant women from the onset of labor to the end of lactation.

GROUND CAKE ('Alkąąd-Yilkąąd, Łeehyilzhoozh)

Ingredients:

50 lbs. stone ground yellow cornmeal
50 lbs. stone ground whole wheat flour
12 lbs. coarsely strong ground sprouted wheat
1 large pail of simmering water
10 lbs. brown sugar
5 lbs. raisins
1 basketful of corn husks

Preparation:

1. *Mix both 50 lbs. of stone ground yellow cornmeal and ground whole wheat flour and pour in handfuls into one large pail of simmering water, stirring constantly.*
2. *Stir the cornmeal with stirring sticks ('adistsiin), removing any lumps.*
3. *Add sugar sparingly until the entire cornmeal is used.*
4. *Add wheat sprouts and raisins.*
5. *Dig a pit in the ground about one yard across and 10 inches deep. Then build a fire in the pit. When the pit is thoroughly heated take the hot coals out.*
6. *Line the pit with several layers of pre-soaked corn husks.*
7. *Pour the mush into the layers of corn husks and cover the mush with corn husks.*
8. *Cover with moist dirt and then cover with coals.*
9. *Build a fire over the pit. (Keep the fire going for 8 hours until the cake is cooked.)*

***'Adistsiin (stirring sticks),** is made out of thin sticks of sage or greasewood tied in the middle. It is used by Navajo women to stir mush and as a strainer to catch pieces of ashes as the water in which the ash has been soaking is poured into the cornmeal.*

NAVAJO CAKE

Ingredients:

6 cups of water
4 cups blue cornmeal
2 cups yellow cornmeal
½ cup raisins
½ cup wheat sprouts
½ cup brown sugar

Preparation:

1. *Put 6 cups of water in a saucepan.*
2. *Add 4 cups of precooked blue cornmeal.*
3. *Add 2 cups of precooked yellow cornmeal.*
4. *Add ½ cup raisins.*
5. *Add ½ cup wheat sprouts.*
6. *Add ½ cup brown sugar. Blend well and dissolve all lumps.*
7. *Pour in baking pan and cover with foil.*
8. *Bake at 250 degrees for 4 hours. Cake must cook slowly.*

**NOTE*
The recipe for Navajo cake and ground cake are identical only that this is cooked in the oven.

PANCAKE/GRIDDLE CAKE ('Abe'beeneezmasí/Noogazí)

Ingredients:

2½ cups blue cornmeal
½ cup white enriched flour
1½ cup can milk
1 cup water
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking powder

Preparation:

1. Put 2½ cups blue cornmeal in a bowl.
2. Add ½ cup white enriched flour.
3. Add 1 tsp. salt.
4. Add 1 tsp. baking powder.
5. Mix all together.
6. Pour 1 cup water along with 1½ cups can milk.
7. Mix well both dry and liquid ingredients like you do regular pancake mix.
8. Pour on hot greased skillet very thin, cook until brown on both sides.
9. Serve with coffee and mutton stew.

To Prepare Juniper Ash:

Ingredients:

Several juniper branches
Medium sized fire
Medium sized screen (big enough to fit over saucepan)

Gather juniper branches for burning for ash. Place a screen over a saucepan. Set fire to the bushy part of the juniper branches, but do not burn twigs the screen will keep large debris out of the ash. Pass a stick over the top of the screen as the ashes accumulate to push the ash through the screen.

MUSH, CORNMEAL/PORRIDGE (Taa'niil)

Ingredients:

4 cups cornmeal
3 cups water
½ cup wheat sprouts
1 cup juniper ash with 1 cup boiling water

Preparation:

1. Mix 4 cups of dried cornmeal into 3 cups boiling water.
2. Stir and mix well, removing all lumps.
3. Mix small amounts of wheat sprouts until sweetened.
4. Add 1 tblsp. of juniper ash at a time until mush/porridge thickens.
5. The mush is then set outside to chill overnight.
6. The mush is ready when the mush/porridge turns into a frozen jello like pudding.

*NOTE
This cornmeal mush is only prepared during the winter months when temperatures are very cold.

BLUE CORN MUSH (Taa'niil, Tanaashgiizh)

Ingredients:

1 cup juniper ash prepared with 1 cup boiling water
3 cups boiling water
4 cups blue cornmeal

Preparation:

1. *Mix 1 cup juniper ash with 1 cup boiling water.*
2. *Put 3 cups water in a pot and boil.*
3. *Strain ashes into water and stir.*
4. *Add 4 cups of blue cornmeal and stir.*
5. *Boil for 30 minutes, stirring constantly.*
6. *Take off heat and stir.*
7. *Serve cool with fried bread.*

Navajo Roasted Corn

Navajo Roasted Corn (Neeshjizhii). *To prepare Navajo roasted corn one must build a fire in an adobe oven and keep it going all day. Clean out all the ashes and put in the ears of corn, husk and all, and ½ bucket of water. Seal the oven with a rock and mud. Let the corn bake all night. In the morning scrape the kernels off the ear and dry in the sun.*

Dried corn can be used in many different dishes once it is prepared. The most popular dish among the Navajo is the hominy stew.

BLUE CORN BREAD (Loaf) (Naadą́ą́ 'łees'áán)

Ingredients:

1 cup juniper ash and 1 cup boiling water
3½ cups boiling water
6 cups cornmeal

Preparation:

1. *Mix 1 cup juniper ash with 1 cup boiling water.*
2. *Put 3½ cups water in a pot and boil.*
3. *Strain juniper water into a pot.*
4. *Add 6 cups blue cornmeal. Knead until dough is soft but firm.*
5. *Shape into 2 or 3 loaves.*
6. *Bake in hot ashes for 1 hour.*
7. *Brush off ashes and serve warm.*

BLUE CORNMEAL DUMPLINGS (Naadą́ą́' k'íneeshbizhii)

Ingredients:

1 cup juniper ash and 1 cup boiling water
3½ cups water
6 cups ground blue cornmeal
3 cups water in separate pot.

Preparation:

1. Mix 1 cup juniper ash and 1 cup boiling water.
2. Put 3 ½ cups water in a pot and boil.
3. Strain juniper ashes into the water and stir.
4. Add 6 cups blue cornmeal, knead until dough is soft but firm.
5. Shape the dough into small thumb size balls.
6. Put 3 cups water in a big pot and boil.
7. Add dough to boiling water and stir.
8. Dough will make its own gravy. Serve hot.

*NOTE
An old Navajo custom requires that the dumplings should be made round in the winter, but slightly flattened in the summer, or else the round shape brings sleet in the summer.

SWEET TAMALES (Nijiłǫ'í)

Ingredients:

25 lbs. white cornmeal
1 cup white sugar
2 cups raisins
¼ cup ground wheat sprouts
1 basketful corn husks
1 large pot of simmering water

Preparation:

1. Mix 25 lb. white cornmeal in handfuls into a large pot of simmering water.
2. Stir the cornmeal with stirring sticks (ádístsiin), removing all lumps.
3. Add 1 cup sugar.
4. Add 2 cups raisins. Stir.
5. Stir in ¼ cup wheat sprouts.
6. In a separate pan soak corn husks in simmering water.
7. Make small packages of the cornmeal by wrapping them in soaked corn husks and tie with stripes of corn husks.
8. Put the wrapped packages in a pot and boil for 1 hour, adding water as needed.
9. Cool and serve with coffee and mutton stew.

MUTTON LOAF

Ingredients:

2 cups diced mutton
½ cup canned tomatoes
1 cup chopped bread
½ cup chopped onion
½ tsp. salt
1 tblsp chopped celery
¼ tsp. pepper

Preparation:

1. Put 2 cups diced mutton in a bowl and grind with a meat grinder.
2. Add ½ cup canned tomatoes
3. Add 1 cup bread chopped fine.
4. Add ½ cup of chopped onion.
5. Add ½ tsp. salt.
6. Add 1 tblsp. chopped celery.
7. Add ¼ tsp. pepper.
8. Mix well, form into loaf. Place in 8½" x 11" oven pan. Bake in oven at 350 degrees for 45 minutes.

Traditionally, adult Navajos did not consume animal products such as eggs, milk, or milk products. With increased availability, this is changing somewhat. For many Navajos, the first time eggs or milk were regularly served was in the old boarding schools and the endless breakfast is still remembered. It was a very difficult adjustment indeed as the traditional breakfast meal was often meat or stew with fry bread or tortillas.

BACKBONE HOMINY STEW ('Atoo' or Ha ńiigai)

Ingredients:

10 pieces of backbone of mutton
1 large pot of boiling water
2 cups dry roasted corn

Preparation:

1. Cut up 10 pieces of backbone of mutton for stew.
2. Put water in a large pot and boil.
3. Add the 10 pieces of backbone of mutton and 2 cups dry roasted corn and boil for 8 hours.
4. Add 1 cup of water every hour until meat is tender.
5. Serve hot with fried bread and coffee.

MUTTON BURGERS

Ingredients:

4 cups diced raw mutton
½ cup chopped onion
½ tsp. salt

Preparation:

1. Put 4 cups raw mutton in a bowl and grind with meat grinder.
2. Add ½ cup chopped onion.
3. Add ½ tsp. salt, mix well.
4. Make into patties and fry in skillet.
5. Serve like you do hamburgers with tortilla or fried bread.

Meat is the mainstay of the Navajo diet. Although meat is from a great many animals, both domestic and wild are eaten, mutton is by far the most common.

Goat is eaten once in awhile, but is not preferred because it is difficult to butcher and the meat is often very lean.

MUTTON STEW ('Atoo')

Ingredients:

4 cups diced mutton
6-8 cups water
vegetables
spices (optional)

Preparation:

To make mutton stew any part of the meat can be used. The backbone, neck, or the hind leg are often put in the stew. Sometimes bones are cut in half and added.

The meat is put into a pot of water and boiled for at least 30 minutes. Then the vegetables can be added. Potatoes, carrots, celery, and any other vegetables should be cut up. Other spices can be added to taste. The stew should then simmer until the vegetables are done.

Serve with coffee and fried bread.

BLOOD SAUSAGE (Dił)

Ingredients:

4 cups sheep blood
4 cups yellow commeal
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. red powdered chile
3 cups chopped potatoes
1 cup muscle meat
1 sheep stomach
1½ cups sheep fat

Preparation:

1. Mix 4 cups sheep blood and 1½ cups sheep fat.
2. Add 1½ cups yellow commeal and stir.
3. Add 1 tsp. salt and stir.
4. Add 1 tsp. red powdered chile.
5. Add 3 cups raw peeled chopped potatoes
6. Add 1 cup chopped muscle meat and mix well.
7. Wash and clean sheep stomach thoroughly, inside and out.
8. Stuff stomach and tie with string.
9. Put 12 cups water in a large pot and bring to a gentle rolling boil. Sausage may burst if the boiling becomes too rapid.
10. Boil about 30 minutes, until sausage is brown. Add water to pot as needed. The sausage can also be roasted in a pit.

TORTILLA (Náneeskaádi)

Ingredients:

4 cups flour
1 tsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
2 tbsp. powdered milk
1½ cup warm water

Preparation:

1. Put 4 cups of flour in a bowl.
2. Add 1 tsp. baking powder and 1 tsp salt.
3. Add 2 tblsp. powdered milk.
4. Mix all together.
5. Pour 1½ cups warm water to form dough.
6. Knead until dough is soft but not sticky.
7. Cover with a cloth and allow to stand for about 15 minutes.
8. Shape into balls and 2 inches across then flatten by patting and stretching the dough with the hands and fingers until the dough is flat and round or it may be rolled out by using a rolling pin.
9. Put flatten dough on a hot grill and let it bake. You know its done when you see that the edges are brown.

YEAST BREAD (Dílk'ǫsh bááh)

Ingredients:

6 cups flour
2 tsps. salt
3 tblsp. sugar
⅔ cup nonfat dry milk
⅓ cup shortening
2½ cups warm water
2 packages dry yeast

Preparation:

1. Mix in a bowl, 6 cups flour.
2. Add 2 tsp. salt.
3. Add 3 tblsp. sugar.
4. Add ⅔ cup nonfat dry milk.
5. In another bowl, mix ⅓ shortening.
6. Mix with 2½ cups warm water.
7. Add to flour mixture 2 packages dry yeast and stir.
8. Blend well and knead by hand. Cover and let it rise for 1 hour.
9. Make small rolls or shape into several loaves and rise for 15 minutes. Then bake in oven at 450 degrees for 30-40 minutes.

FRIED BREAD (Dahdiníilghaazh)

Ingredients:

4 cups flour
1 tblsp. baking powder
1 tsp. salt
2 tblsp. powdered milk
1½ cup warm water
1 cup lard or shortening

Preparation:

1. Put 4 cups flour in a bowl.
2. Add 1 tblsp. baking powder and 1 tsp salt.
3. Add 2 tblsp. powdered milk.
4. Mix all together.
5. Pour 1½ cup warm water to form dough.
6. Knead dough by hand until it is soft but not sticky.
7. Cover with a cloth and allow to stand for about 15 minutes.
8. Shape into balls about 2 inches across then flatten by patting and stretching the dough with the hands and fingers until the dough is flat and round, or it may be rolled out using a rolling pin.
9. Melt 1 cup lard about an inch deep in frying pan. The grease should be hot enough before the dough is put in. Fry one side, then turn. Fry bread until it is golden brown on both sides.

NAVAJO TACO

Ingredients:

2 medium tomatoes, diced
2 medium onions, diced
½ pound shredded cheddar cheese
2 cups lettuce
shredded ground chile peppers (optional)

Prepared Ingredients:

4 pieces of fry bread
2 cups cooked Pinto beans

Preparation:

1. Put fry bread on plate.
2. Put other ingredients on top of fry bread, in the following order.

1. Dice ingredients.
2. Fry bread is the base.
3. The beans are cooked just right.
4. Add beans.
5. Add fresh ingredients.
6. Eat with chile or sauce.

PINTO BEANS (Naa'ołi)

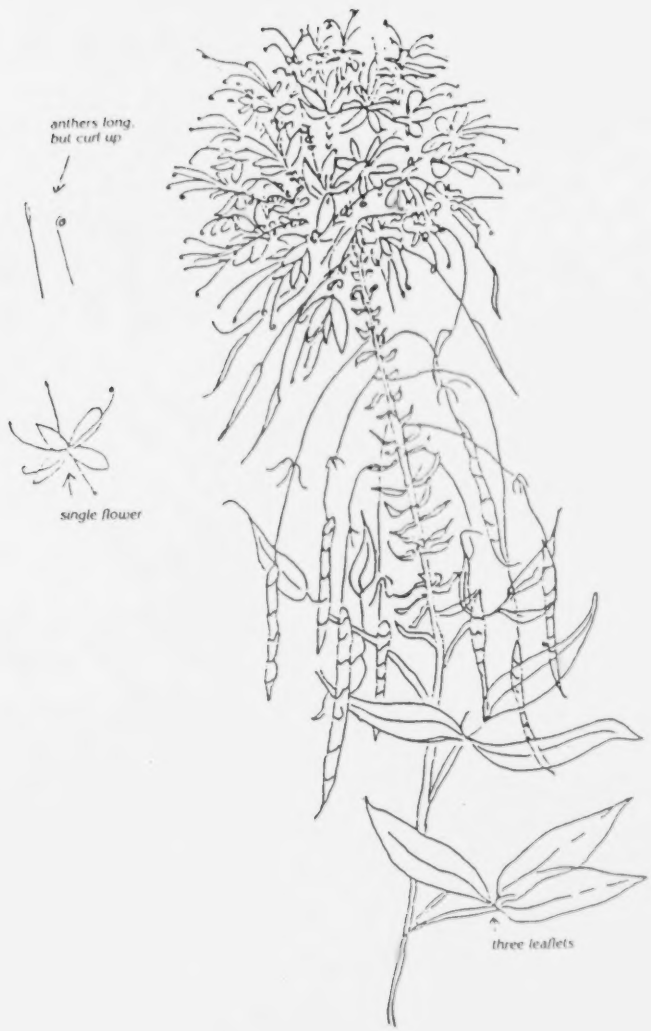
Ingredients:

2 cups washed Pinto Beans
6 cups water
1 tsp. salt
¼ cup sheep fat (shortening or lard)
4 cups of water

Preparation:

1. Soak the beans in water overnight.
2. Drain the water, rinse the beans.
3. Add the salt, sheep fat, and water to the beans.
4. Boil until tender over medium heat, for almost 6 hours.

EDIBLE WILD PLANTS AND THEIR PREPARATION



Rocky Mountain Beeweed (Cleome serrulata)

Rocky Mountain Beeweed (Waa'). *Rocky Mountain Beeweed grows in the more arid forests throughout the West at altitudes of 4,500 to 7,000 feet. The stems are tall and branched and there are 3 to 5 leaflets. Attractive purplish-pink or white flowers make it highly visible when in bloom.*

Navajos dry the leaves and store them for winter use.

The young plants are gathered up until July, before the flowers appear.

Rocky Mountain Beeweed is usually prepared by washing and draining three times to remove the bitter taste and hung to dry. It is often added to stew made out of wild onions, wild celery, and a little tallow or bits of meat. Morsels of bread are then dipped into the stew and eaten.

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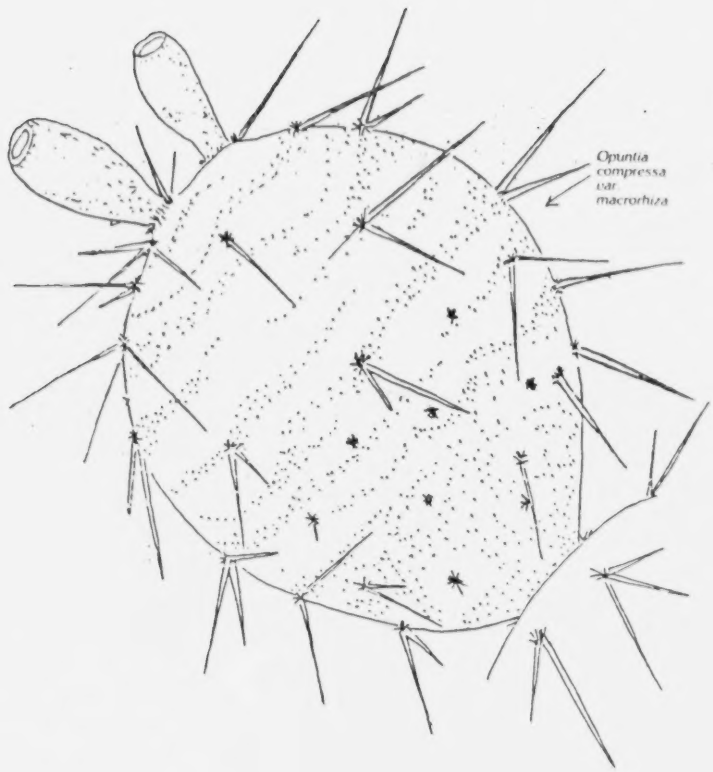

Prickly Pear (Opuntia phaeacantha)

Prickly Pear (Hosh). *This cactus is found in desert areas throughout the Southwest. It is characterized by flat, fleshy joints or pads that grow in clumps. Large waxy flowers appear in the spring, followed by juicy red fruits.*

A Navajo legend says that when prickly pears are being gathered, a hair must be plucked from the gatherer's head so that the plant will yield fruit without twisting its heart. This is typical of many of the myths connected with wild plant foods. The Navajos are so very dependent on the foods they gather that they do not dare risk offending the spirits that rule the plants themselves which many believe to have souls. To do so might mean starvation.

The prickly pear which is quite sweet is eaten fresh or dried or made into a fruit juice, or jelly.

The fruit is picked with a forked stick and spines are removed then split and dried in the sun.

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Cactus Pads

Gloves should be worn when harvesting any part of the cactus and should be cut off with a sharp knife.

The pads may be prepared as follows:

1. *Parboil half a dozen pads, peel and slice, then boil until tender in slightly salted water.*
2. *Roast the peeled sliced pads or make a syrup from 2 cups of sugar boiled in one cup of water and boil the peeled, sliced pads until the syrup is absorbed. When dried it can be eaten like candy or boil the pads until they dissolve into a syrup, sieve the pulp and discard and eat like jelly.*
3. *The pads may also be made into pulp and this is then formed into cakes and allowed to dry for later use. The dried cakes can be fried or roasted. Strips of parboiled, peeled pads can also be chewed with further cooking. In this way, the cactus is like chewing gum.*

Seeds

Collect and dry seeds and grind into flour. The flour is used to thicken soups or pudding or fruit dishes. It is somewhat similar to tapioca.

Fruits

The fruits are bright red when they are ripe. They can be picked, rubbed with a handful of grass to remove the bristles and eaten raw. This way they are tangy and juicy. It is even better with the skin peeled. Raw prickly pear fruit must be fully ripe; the redder and plumper, the better. Under-ripe fruit is extremely tart.

Prickly Pear Fruit Jelly

A lunch bagfull will produce 4 cups of jelly.

To prepare cactus

1. *Wash and scald the fruit. Remove spots, but not thorns.*
2. *Cut each fruit in half, cover with water and cook for 15 minutes.*
3. *Strain juice through a colander lined with cheesecloth.*

To prepare the jelly

Ingredients:

3 cups cactus juice
½ cup lemon juice
1 package pectin
4½ cups sugar

Preparation:

1. *Mix together juice, pectin and lemon juice.*
2. *Boil over high heat, stirring constantly, until mixture comes to a full boil.*
3. *Add sugar and boil 1½ minutes longer, stirring constantly.*
4. *Remove from heat, skim, pour into sterile glasses and seal.*

Ground cherry (Physalis pubescens)

Ground cherry (Bijh yildee'ó). The ground cherry grows on a leafy, vining plant. Its flowers range from yellow to white to purple, depending on the species. The ground cherry is found in open areas throughout the west on moist to medium ground from sea level to 8,500 feet.

Ground cherries can be picked and left in their husks to ripen for several weeks. The ripe berries are in the orange-to-rust range of color. The fruit usually appears in the fall.

The berries are very sour and can be mixed with honey to sweeten or used as a jam. It can also be dried and ground and stored for winter use as a flour. Small amounts of this flour is added to wheat flour for use in baking needs.

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Hollowstomach/Bristly Hidden Flower (Crypthantha sp.)

Hollowstomach/Bristly Hidden Flower (Tsáhalts'aa). *This rather coarse, pale green, hairy little plant is capped with a head of small, light-yellow flowers and grows from thick woody roots.*

It is four inches tall, and has tiny white flowers with five petals. The stems and the edges of the leaves are bristly. A tea made from this plant "keeps you slender".

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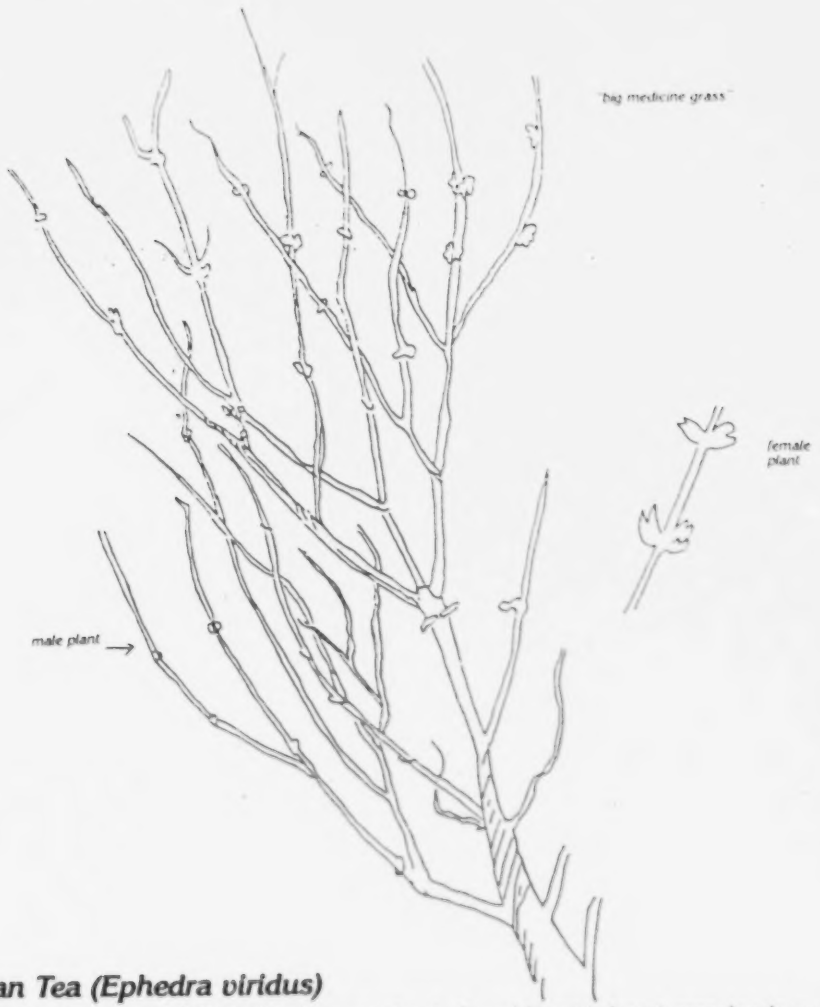

Morman Tea (Ephedra viridus)

Morman Tea (Tl'oh'azhihil Tsoh). Morman tea is found in arid desert grasslands and sage country up to 7,000 feet throughout the western United States. The plants are stiff shrubs with slender jointed branches. The leaves are reduced to scales and occur in pairs or threes. The plants flower in the spring.

Although the strong tea of Ephedra is widely used medicinally as a cure for syphillis, the beverage also makes a pleasant drink for those not so afflicted. Many of the desert tribes chew ephedra stems to relieve thirst when they were on the move and away from water supplies.

The Navajos use Ephedra viridus and boil the twigs and leaves with alum to produce a dye of light tan color.

To prepare Morman tea you measure water for the number of cups of tea desired and bring to a boil. Add 1 handful of stems for each cup. (The Navajos first roast the stems in the campfire.) Remove the pot from the fire and let the tea steep for 20 minutes or more, according to strength desired. Flavor with sugar, lemon, or honey.

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cota wrapped for drying and storage

Navajo Tea (Cota)

Navajo Tea (Ch'il gohwéhé). Cota is found in the Southwest on grassy plains, mesas, and open woodlands from 4,000 to 7,500 elevation. The yellow flowerheads of the cota are borne on long, green stalks and the leaves are very long and slender. It can be found from May to October.

This plant has been extensively used for "tea" by practically all Indians of the Southwest from ancient times to the present.

To prepare Navajo tea submerge a bundle of fresh or dried cota in a pan of water and boil for 5 minutes or until tea is the desired strength.

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Piñon Pine Nuts (Pinus, edulis)

Piñon Nuts (Neeshc'íí). *Piñon pines have short trunks and conic crowns. The old bark is grayish-brown. They are usually smaller than other pine trees. Nut pines are found at elevations of 4,000 to 7,000 feet throughout the Southwest in large stands or mixed with juniper trees.*

The nuts are picked in the fall or early winter. The Navajos apparently collect the most of any other tribe and sell to the nearest trading posts.

The seeds are very rich and supply considerable protein and fat, and have more than 3,000 calories a pound!

Besides being eaten raw or roasted directly from the shell, piñon nuts were boiled into a gruel, ground and formed into cakes, or rolled into balls and eaten as a delicacy.

Juniper Berries
One Seed Juniper (Cupressaceae).

Juniper Berries (Dzidze'). *This common shrub tree is abundant in the Southwest, growing with, and lower than, the piñon.*

The trunk is short, its branching is close to the ground and is about 18 inches in diameter. The small, succulent berries are blue and have a delicate powdery surface coating. The berries are eaten raw, roasted or ground into a meal and mixed with bread dough.

The leaves are burned into ashes and mixed with cornmeal mush and breads. A tea is also made from the branches to help women regain strength after childbearing. The berries when dried are also made into necklaces.

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Manzanita (Arctostaphylos pringlei)

Manzanita (K'iŋjú'ahl). *This shrubby evergreen plant grows in dense thickets. The crooked branches are covered with a smooth mahogany-colored bark. Various species grow from 3,500 to 8,500 feet elevation in the southwest.*

Manzanita is the Spanish word for "little apple," and that is a very good term for the fruit of this plant, as the red berries look just like very tiny apples.

The Indians used the reputedly nutritious berries in a variety of ways. The berries were eaten raw or cooked, made into jelly, and crushed for a beverage. The seeds were sometimes extracted and ground for a mush.

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Sego-Lily (Calohortus nuttali)

Sego-Lily ('Áłtsíníí). *One of the most beautiful flowers of the Southwest is the sego-lily mariposa. The graceful, tulip-like flower blooms in color from cream-white tinged with purple to lilac or blue from May to July. It associates with sagebrush dry mesas and foothills and also in open mountain forests at a elevation of 5,000 to 8,000 feet.*

The cup-shaped flower is composed of three pointed green sepals, and three petals beautifully marked at their base, first with yellow near the center, then a purplish spot, and farther out a variously fringed or bordered gland.

The bulbs are eaten raw and early Navajos ate them for food in time of scarcity.

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Squash Blossoms

Squash Blossoms (Tá'iitsóhii). *Fresh blossoms are a very tasty vegetable available only for a short time each year. After squash plants have sprouted and before the fruits have appeared, there are golden yellow blossoms on the plants. These leaves form squash plants, and are picked just before they reach full bloom.*

When picked, wash the leaves thoroughly to make certain there are no honey bees in them. Fresh bloosoms are then boiled in slightly salted water for about ten minutes. About thirty blossoms are used for each cup of water. They must not be boiled or dry and should not be overcooked. The texture should be that of cooked spinach.

Blossoms can be hung upside down in a dry, airy place until well dry. These may be used in cooking. Dry blossoms are crushed and mixed with a small amount of water to form a paste which has healing qualities.

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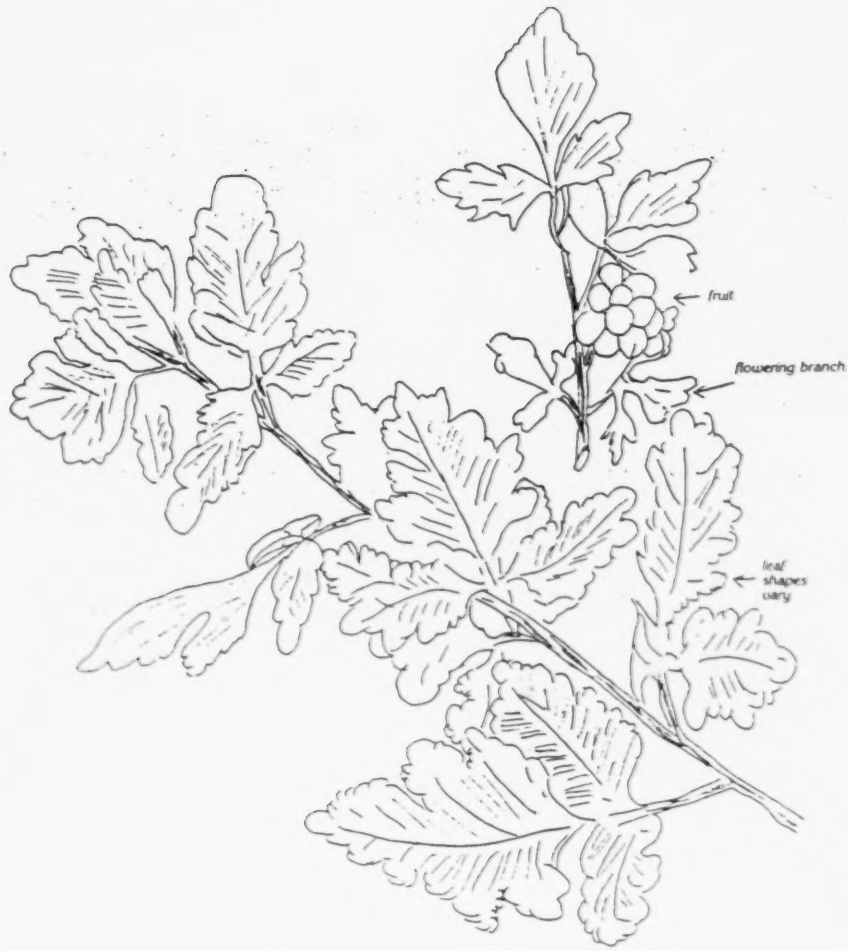

Squawberry (Rhus trilobata)

Squawberry (Chilchin). *This small bush (rarely over 6 feet tall) grows on slopes and in canyons at altitudes of 2,500 feet to 7,500 feet. It is found throughout the Southwest wherever there is sufficient moisture. The bright red somewhat flattened berries, which appear in the summer, are usually covered by fine white hairs and are sticky on the outside but not juicy on the inside. The foliage has a distinctive but not unpleasant odor. Each dark green compound leaf has three leaflets.*

For recipes, from whole ground dried squawberries, grind the berries as finely as possible. Then sift, using a fine sieve. Use only the fine particles that pass through the sieve; the coarser pieces that remain are fine for rhus juice.

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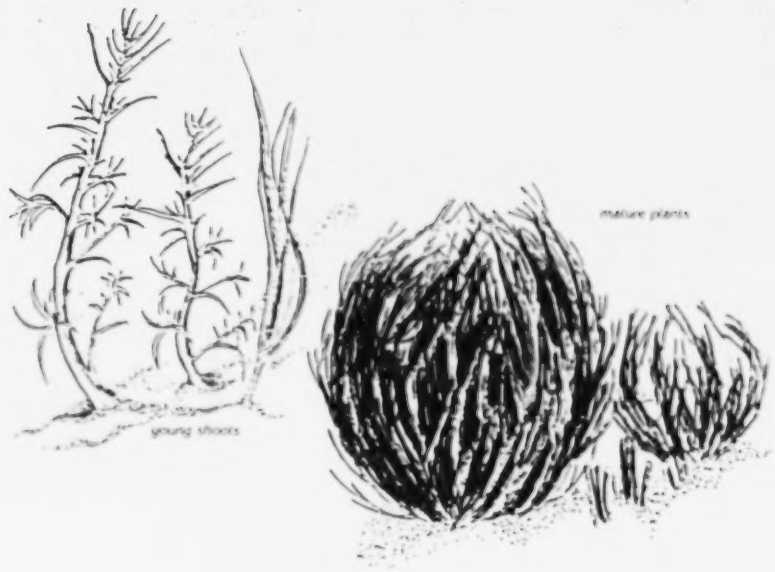

Tumbleweed (Salsola kali)

Tumbleweed (Ch'il deenii). *Tumbleweeds are found widely distributed through North America at elevations of 1,500 to 8,000 feet on roadsides and in fields. As the plants mature they take a large, round, shape, and become very thorny.*

The uninitiated would be hard-pressed to understand how anything like that could be eaten. But the Indians are very resourceful in finding good things to eat. And tumbleweed greens are good to eat, but they must picked and eaten when the first shoots are only 2 to 3 inches tall. If the plants are any larger, they will have developed spines. The sprouts usually appear after the first summer rains and grow quickly.

Tumbleweeds sprouts can be boiled and eaten alone with butter or small pieces of mutton fat. The very young sprouts can be chopped raw into salads.

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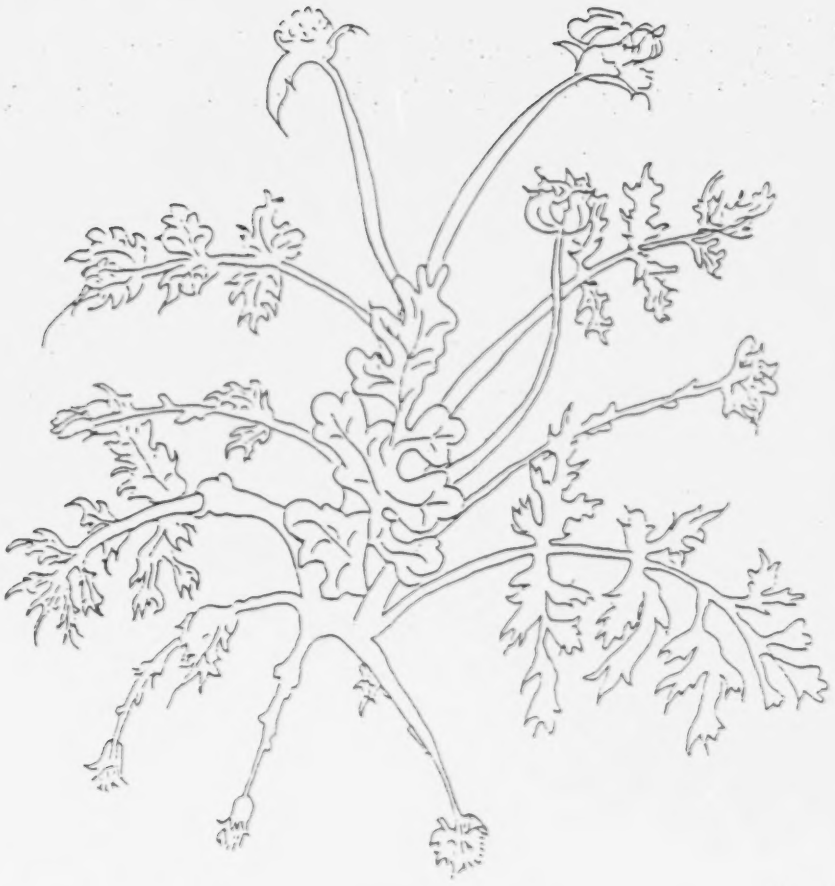

Wild Celery (Cymopterus glomeratus)

Wild Celery (Haza'aleehtsoh), *is a small plant, three inches across. The flowers are yellow, and the stem and fruit are purple. It grows on flat open ground near the sheep corrals. It is picked and dried. Later it is added as an herb to mutton stew.*

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Wild Onion (Allium cernuum)

Wild Onion (Ti'ohchin). *Wild onions are found distributed in moist ground throughout the Southwest during the spring and summer. The various species range from 1,000 to 10,000 feet elevation and all grow from basal bulbs and have the characteristic onion odor. The leaves may be tubular or flat. While they are usually few in number and slender, some have broad leaves. The single umbrellalike flower ranges in color from orchid, rose pink, and pale pink to white and is borne on a leafless stalk.*

The bulbs of wild onions may be used like regular onions in gravies and stews and cooked in combination with other vegetables. The leaves may be chopped fine and used like chives in salads or sauces.

Onions should not be peeled. Roast on a bed of medium hot coals, turning occasionally. When the onions are tender, puncture the skin to let the steam escape. Scoop out the centers and serve with salt and pepper.

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Canaigre (Rumex hymenosepalus)

Wild Rhubarb and dock (Chąą'inil). *Canaigre is found in sandy stream beds and fields below 6,000 feet. The long, green leaves appear as early as February in mild-winter years. Its very short stems have a reddish tinge. Flowers and, later, seeds appear on a central stalk that turns rust red in the fall.*

Indians use canaigre either as food or for medicine. Desert Indians, always confronted by a water shortage, often roasted the succulent leaves in ashes rather than boiling them.

The Navajos use the seeds in mush.

Very young canaigre leaves may be boiled in 2 or 3 changes of water to counteract the bitter taste. They can then be served with butter, or chopped and fried with mutton grease.

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Yucca: datil (Yucca baccata)

Yucca Banana (Hashk'aan). *The datil is found in the Southwest and grows on mesas and foothills at elevations of 3,000 to 8,000 feet, often with piñon and juniper. These yuccas usually have no leafy stem, the crowns sit level with the ground. The flower stems are usually short, while the fruits are quite long and banana-shaped, turning reddish when ripe. Fruits appear from May to September, depending on the elevation.*

The various species of yucca are considered by many to have been the most important of the wild plants utilized by the Indians of the Southwest. Besides serving utilitarian uses from food to fiber, yucca is also used ceremonially. The roots of the yucca have a high component of saponin, which has detergent properties. When pounded and soaked in water, the roots, called amole, yield copious suds. The suds are used for washing hair and garments, and ritually in a great many ceremonies.

The ripe fruit is eaten raw, baked in hot coals or dried for winter use. The dried cakes are later mixed with water to make a syrup, and eaten with meat and bread. It can also be boiled with commeal to make a gruel.

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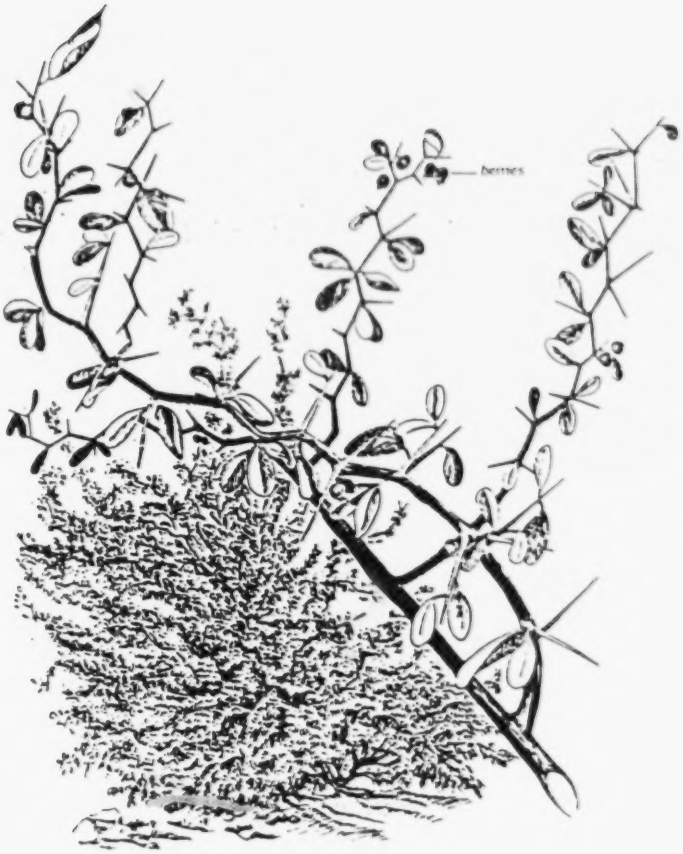

Wolf berry (Lycium pallidum)

Wolf berry (Haashch'ée'dáá'). *The various species of the wolf berry are found along the washes and on dry slopes of desert and semidesert areas of the Southwest at altitudes of 2,500 to 7,000 feet. The many-seeded red to dark red berries of all the species are edible, but some are juicier and fleshier than others. In some cases the berries have a white "bloom." The flowers and fruit generally appear singly on the thorny shrub whose small and smooth-edged leaves usually grow in bundles. The bushes flower early and the berries begin to ripen the middle of May.*

Navajos relish the berries fresh off the bush or dry in the sun, when they become much like raisins.

The berries are also mashed in water to form a beverage and are combined in soups and stews. Because the sweetness and juiciness of the berries varies from bush to bush, in an abundant year only the best berries are picked.

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Wild Carrots, Queen Anne's Lace

Wild Carrots, Queen Anne's Lace (Chaast'ezhlitsoh), *is a carrot that grows wild. The name Queen Anne's Lace was given the plants because of their large clusters of small white or yellowish flowers. The wild carrot is either an annual or a biennial. It grows three feet tall. Its yellow-orange roots resemble the domestic carrot.*

The wild carrot starts to grow in April and by mid July they are three-quarters grown. The roots are long and cylindrical with a brownish outer covering which is peeled horizontally around the root. The inner layers of the root are white and can be eaten raw with no preparation. The roots may also be dried for later use. The roots are torn into strips and laid in the sun for a day or two, until they are dry. Then they are ground with a grinding stone.

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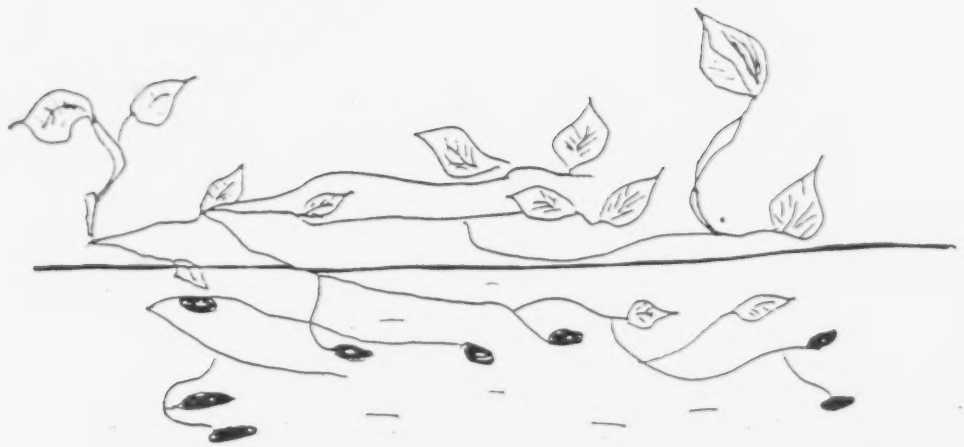

Wild Potato

Wild Potato (Nímasii), *grow under juniper trees in sandy soil and are low-growing vines which crawl across the ground. The root of the plant is dug up and is the part used. They are quite a bit smaller then domestic potatoes, but the flavor is much sweeter. They are stored over the winter, after fall harvest. When eaten they are either peeled and boiled or sliced and fried.*

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